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COMMAND AND CONTROL OF
LIMITED AIRBORNE RECONNAISSANCE ASSETS

BY

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Recent changes in the Unified Command Plan and overall Department of Defense reorganization have greatly altered command and control arrangements for intelligence and reconnaissance forces, but the changes have been problematical. Limited reconnaissance assets offer unique capabilities but also pose unique support and employment constraints. They have capabilities needed in peacetime, crisis and war. Because of their limited numbers, they present a dilemma for those trying to balance increasing peacetime demands for intelligence with training and preparation for war. Prior to the recent change in command and control procedures, CINCSAC (now CINCSTRAT) exercised operational control (OPCON) of all strategic reconnaissance forces (U-2, RC-135 and SR-71). This system worked well in satisfying peacetime collection requirements and for overall program management but failed to support theater CINC's requirements for exercise support and preparation for war. Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm demonstrated that new procedures were needed. As a result of Desert Shield/Desert Storm lessons learned and reductions in force structure and organization generally, theater CINC's were given OPCON over strategic reconnaissance forces. This command arrangement posed problems, as theater CINC staffs had neither the manning nor expertise to effectively command and control the reconnaissance forces. Attempts to better define responsibilities for command and control have fragmented responsibility and accountability and have left unanswered questions about responding to contingencies. The study concludes that USCINCSTRAT should exercise OPCON of all reconnaissance forces, through a Global Operations Center, as a supporting CINC for all theaters. In disagreements over priorities, theater CINC's would go directly to the Joint Staff for resolution. Inherent in this command arrangement would be dedicated support for exercises and specific plans and agreements with theater CINC's to augment theater staffs for exercises, real world contingencies, and transition to war. During war, theater CINC's would exercise direct operational control through a staff augmented with USSTRATCOM expertise.

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COMMAND AND CONTROL OF LIMITED AIRBORNE RECONNAISSANCE ASSETS AN INDIVIDUAL STUDY PROJECT

by

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Introduction

Recent changes in the Unified Command Plan and overall Department of Defense reorganization have greatly altered command and control arrangements for intelligence and reconnaissance forces worldwide. As a result of the Goldwater-Nichols Reorganization Act and the experience of Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm, geographical theater commanders-in-chief (CINCs) have been given increased authority and control over forces operating within their theaters, including reconnaissance assets. The change in command and control of limited airborne reconnaissance forces has been problematic for several reasons.

This study begins with a look at both the capabilities and constraints of limited size airborne reconnaissance fleets used for both peace and war. It examines strengths and weaknesses in past command and control arrangements for these assets and reviews the impetus for recent changes, and reviews the overall effectiveness of command and control both before and after recent changes. The study concludes that limited airborne reconnaissance assets used for both strategic and tactical collection require unique command and control arrangements to make optimum use of their capabilities during peacetime, transition to war and wartime.

Some definitions are in order. For the purposes of this study, "command and control" includes those functions usually associated with operational control of forces, to include organizing and employing the forces, assigning tasks, designating objectives, and giving authoritative direction necessary for accomplishing the mission.¹ A key issue in this study is who should have the authority to task and schedule reconnaissance assets, as well as who has the responsibility and accountability for their effective employment and safe operation.

A second term requiring clarification is "limited airborne reconnaissance assets". The author uses as a basis for this study those forces that were once designated strategic

reconnaissance assets under the command and control of Headquarters, Strategic Air Command (SAC). These assets include the U-2, RC-135 and, until its retirement in 1989, the SR-71. While these programs serve as a model for this study, it is important to note that any airborne reconnaissance assets that are limited in number and have both extensive peacetime and wartime roles would be appropriate material for this analysis. Any future employment of such systems should carefully consider potentially unique command and control issues involved in these kinds of fleets.

How "Different" Are Limited Reconnaissance Assets?

Any unique requirements must be considered when planning for command and control of military systems. Reconnaissance assets, especially those in limited numbers, certainly possess some unique support and employment requirements, but also offer unique capabilities not available elsewhere. Any discussion of command and control for these assets must begin with a clear understanding of their roles and special requirements for employment.

Reconnaissance assets differ from other military systems in several important aspects. They have capabilities that are essential to intelligence collection in peacetime, crisis, and war. Typically, their numbers are limited, not just during crisis or war; and so they face competing priorities at all times. They present unusual operational constraints because of the small size of the systems and their employment in small numbers. By the very nature of their work, the systems are not well understood by force application planners who do not always have the opportunity to work with them closely on a regular basis. Recognizing and understanding these issues is an essential first step in developing an effective command and control organization.

Since the United States has not been involved in a lengthy conflict since Vietnam,

airborne reconnaissance missions have been used primarily for peacetime collection. On occasions when international tensions have resulted in the use of military force, such as Grenada, Libya, Panama and the Persian Gulf, these airborne assets were then used in the tactical role.² The transition from peacetime to wartime use has been far from seamless and demonstrated clearly that command and control systems optimized for one will not be sufficient for the other.

Military commanders who exercise command and control must understand the impact on reconnaissance assets when transferring from peacetime to war. Writing in 1989, John Macartney pointed out that:

The question of optimizing intelligence for peace, or making it more survivable during war, is important. The trade-offs are something you as a commander or policymaker should be considering now. It is a critical part of your command responsibility, and if war comes, it will be too late to redesign the intelligence infrastructure.³

Understanding the factors that affect this transition from peace to war is essential to building a command and control system responsive during both.

What factors are relevant to the transition from peacetime to wartime use of airborne reconnaissance assets? Aside from the obvious issues in operating in a hostile rather than permissive environment, the key factors involve the timeliness and use of information from these missions. In a briefing paper done while on the Air Staff, Lieutenant Colonel Bobby L. Fairless succinctly gets to the heart of this transition between peacetime and wartime use.

Although the distinction between peacetime and wartime collection requirements are many, the two most predominant are timely reporting and the span of control under the decision maker requesting information.... As political tensions heighten, the timeliness and quantity of information requested begin to drive changing collection strategies.... It is these changing requirements from peacetime to wartime that drive a broad spectrum of collection platforms, capabilities, and collection strategies.⁴

Nearly all intelligence organizations and assets are structured for peacetime. Changes in the national security environment resulting from the end of the Cold War will make the transition for reconnaissance forces from peace to war even more difficult. Typically, peacetime collection has been characterized by relatively fixed intelligence targets, the characteristics of which have seldom varied a great deal. Routes, procedures, users and priorities were somewhat fixed and routine. In transitioning to war, both the intensity and focus of collection must change rapidly. The demand for the number of missions increases quickly, and requirements for information from operational and tactical users begins to compete with national collection requirements. Effectively prioritizing these requirements becomes critical.

As specific threats to U.S. national security interests become more diverse and less structured, it is imperative that a command and control system for airborne collection be available to cope with the chaos and confusion inimical not only to the transition from peace to war, but in responding to unforeseen crises as well.

Additionally, limited airborne reconnaissance assets pose challenges to command and control by mere virtue of their limited numbers. Rarely have there been sufficient assets (to include platforms, sensors, personnel, flying hours, etc.) to satisfy all requirements. Deciding how best to satisfy the multitude of requirements, and to be able to adapt quickly when requirements change, demands a robust command and control system to bridge the gap between too many requirements and too few assets.

The limited size of the fleets also restricts familiarity with their unique requirements and capabilities. Requirements in peacetime dictate specific employment patterns that may limit another theater's opportunity to train with the assets. This lack of familiarity with system

capabilities and constraints must then be overcome when crisis or war demands their extensive use in the theater.

Finally, operational issues unique to airborne reconnaissance assets need to be understood and managed through an effective command and control system. Reconnaissance missions by their very nature require detailed planning and extensive coordination, sometimes at the international level. Requirements often change quickly, requiring extensive responsiveness and flexibility in tasking and scheduling. Reconnaissance flights require more extensive mission monitoring and reporting in peacetime than do more routine, non-reconnaissance operations.

Even mundane, daily issues need to be watched closely for reconnaissance forces. The varying size and duration of contingencies require flexible but centralized logistical support that needs daily attention by those familiar with the systems. Flight activity is restricted at employment locations, so airborne crews must be rotated and trained at their home units. Managing the training of airborne crews against growing demands for increased deployments has been a key issue that needs centralized command and control to ensure short-term demands do not result in long-term reductions in safety or capability.

To be effective, a command and control system for limited airborne reconnaissance assets must be able to manage the unique requirements and capabilities of these systems to provide the best support to all requesters during peacetime, crisis and war.

Command and Control Through Desert Storm

Since the inception of Joint Reconnaissance Center at the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) in 1956, the command and control of limited strategic reconnaissance assets was essentially unchanged until after Desert Storm. This section briefly reviews those policies and procedures

and their strengths and weaknesses as a start point for evaluating more recent changes in the command and control structure.

The Unified Command Plan (UCP) delineates the geographic areas of responsibility and specifies the functions of the unified and specified (U&S) commands. Prior to Desert Storm, the UCP provided guidance for operational control of strategic reconnaissance assets:

Except as otherwise provided in the "General Geographic Areas of Responsibility" section of this document, all forces operating within the geographic area assigned to a unified combatant command shall be assigned or attached to and under the commander of that command.⁵

With this general guidance on command and control, the document goes on to define the Commander-in-Chief, Strategic Air Command (CINCSAC) as the "commander of a specified combatant command comprising all forces assigned for the accomplishment of the commander's mission." The document then assigns CINCSAC responsibility for, "conducting appropriate worldwide strategic reconnaissance."⁶

In addition to this guidance in the UCP, JCS Secretarial Memorandum (SM) 401-87, Peacetime Reconnaissance and Certain Sensitive Operations, provided additional guidance to the U&S commands on command and control of reconnaissance activities. Among those responsibilities:

Plan and conduct peacetime reconnaissance and certain sensitive operations to fulfill validated requirements.

Establish and maintain a reconnaissance center specifically dedicated to exercise command supervision over programs and operations that come under the provisions of peacetime reconnaissance and certain sensitive operations. Any unified or specified command that does not exercise operational command of reconnaissance operations will designate an office of contact to ensure command coordination of PRCISO [Peacetime Reconnaissance and Certain Sensitive Operations]. Upon implementation of any contingency war plan, the command must be able to activate a reconnaissance center to exercise command supervision over reconnaissance programs and operations.⁷

To those unfamiliar with reconnaissance forces, it is important to note that geographic CINCs exercised command and control over some reconnaissance assets. Typically, they included organic naval fleet support assets (P-3, photo capable F-14) and army collection systems (OV-1, RC-12, RU-21) used to support echelons above corps (EAC). While these assets can and do support national requirements, their primary focus is on collection at the tactical and operational level in response to theater collection requirements. For those strategic reconnaissance assets assigned to SAC (U-2, RC-135, SR-71), CINCSAC maintained command and control. In some theaters, reconnaissance centers maintained command and control over certain reconnaissance flights, while strategic reconnaissance flights in the same theater were under command and control of CINCSAC at Offutt Air Force Base, Nebraska.

While there were special provisions for geographic CINCs to assume command of all assets during emergencies, command and control of strategic reconnaissance assets, even during wartime, would remain with CINCSAC. To exercise this command and control and to interface with the geographic CINC during wartime, CINCSAC would deploy a Reconnaissance Advisor and a Reconnaissance Planning Element (RPE) to be attached to the joint command headquarters (J2 or J3) or the air component commander. CINCSAC's deployment order would authorize the reconnaissance forces to operate in support of the theater commander's policy, guidance and directives. In addition, CINCSAC could delegate control and execution authority, normally maintained at Headquarters, SAC, to the RPE.⁸ It is important to note that the RPE concept had not practiced in recent history before Desert Storm.

Thus, CINCSAC exercised operational control of all strategic reconnaissance assets during peace, crisis and war. CINCSAC's theater of operations was worldwide and he could

deploy assets at his discretion when directed by JCS. A Secretary of Defense deployment order was not required. CINCSAC planned and conducted peacetime reconnaissance to fulfill validated requirements for U&S commands and other national agencies as directed.

This command concept had both advantages and disadvantages. First, this concept worked relatively well for peacetime, in that assets were used primarily to satisfy national requirements. Conversely, there was a tendency among theater commanders to shun use of these assets for theater requirements, since the CINC did not directly task or control the assets. On those occasions when theater CINCs tried, they found a command and control system oriented to satisfying a large volume of peacetime, national requirements.

Secondly, the peacetime orientation and heavy national tasking of these assets resulted in a lack of availability for exercises to prepare for wartime use. One of the most serious consequences of this shortfall was that the theater CINC and his staff failed to appreciate fully the capabilities and constraints of the systems and lacked the familiarity necessary to employ them effectively.

Thirdly, assigning these assets to CINCSAC did provide centralized management and program oversight in a number of critical operational issues. CINCSAC's exceptional worldwide command and control system ensured effective flight-following of all missions. As the central point for all assets, CINCSAC directed standardization in crew training for air crews deployed to different theater CINC's areas of responsibility. When requirements tended to exceed resources, as is common in peacetime collection, CINCSAC's staff assisted in brokering requirements to ensure their best use and avoid long term problems with over tasking. Finally, the CINCSAC staff served as the focal point for evaluating such issues as improvements in

procedures and capabilities, airborne threats, basing and logistics issues, and contingency tasking.

Desert Storm Performance: A Need for Change?

Shortcomings with this command and control arrangement and its peacetime orientation became obvious during Desert Shield and Desert Storm. Headquarters, United States Central Command (USCENTCOM) identified several areas where changes are needed, many of which are aimed at improving the intelligence support to the theater commander. The following brief analysis is not intended as an overall reconnaissance performance assessment, but rather looks at the unique problems resulting from the in-place command and control system described above.

In a USCENTCOM briefing on Desert Shield/Storm performance prepared by the Intelligence Directorate, several problems were noted with reconnaissance and intelligence assets. The briefing acknowledged that the intelligence function was not manned and organized for war and there was no roadmap for "ramping up" the necessary personnel.⁹ It is important to note that USCENTCOM prior to Desert Shield had no assigned airborne reconnaissance forces. As a contingency-oriented command it had little opportunity to compete with other theater commanders for the austere exercise support available. In both the Operations (J-3) and Intelligence (J-2) Directorates, there were only small staffs to handle routine USCENTCOM planning and operations functions. A specific plan to augment these staffs for war was apparently not available.

As Desert Shield expanded after August 1, 1991, the command and control of strategic airborne assets from Headquarters, SAC appeared to work well. United States Central Command Headquarters was not sufficiently manned to provide in-theater supervision of the

reconnaissance effort. Strategic Air Command Headquarters continued to provide command and control, though it did not establish the Reconnaissance Planning Element (RPE) in theater according to the SAC Master Plan.

As the size and complexity of the reconnaissance effort grew, USCENTCOM drew on experienced personnel from the Joint Chiefs of Staff, SAC, U.S. European Command (USEUCOM), plus other system specific personnel.¹⁰ It was not until January 7, 1991, that USCENTCOM established a Joint Reconnaissance Center in theater. Command and control of the strategic reconnaissance assets remained with Headquarters, SAC.

During the war, a critical shortfall in this command and control arrangement became apparent. The USCENTCOM briefing notes that, "Occasionally, components would not execute required missions for a myriad of reasons."¹¹ While specific reasons are beyond the classification of this paper, some of the instances concerned hostile threats to specific missions. The Strategic Air Command differed with the theater commander's staff on the threat to the airborne platforms.

The critical issue here is not whether SAC or USCENTCOM was correct, but that command and control of the platforms was segregated from a theater commander engaged in combat who needed reconnaissance missions flown. It is a testament to the dedication and professionalism of both the USCENTCOM and SAC staffs that the number of missions not flown due to disagreements was small; but it is apparent that the command and control structure was flawed, and that in wartime, assets in the theater need to respond directly to tasking from the theater CINC.

With the impetus for change expanding rapidly and the lessons of Desert Shield/Desert

Storm fresh in mind, changes in command and control procedures were made; but it became apparent to many that for limited reconnaissance forces, the proposed changes would create as well as solve problems.

New Changes and New Problems in Command and Control

After Desert Storm, the Department of Defense was pressured to make dramatic organizational changes for several reasons. Despite the military's success in Desert Storm, the end of the Cold War meant certain reductions in force structure and organization. In addition, the many "lessons learned" in Desert Shield/Desert Storm added impetus to making changes. Coupled with budget pressures for better management and efficiency and Congressional pressure to reduce apparent redundancy, major organizational changes were inevitable.

The Air Force began an aggressive reorganization in early 1992. Testifying before the House Armed Services Committee on February 20th, 1992, the Honorable Donald B. Rice, Secretary of the Air Force, presented a broad outline for Air Force reorganization.

Consistent with this integrated vision of airpower, we are restructuring our major commands and combat wings. Overseas commanders in Europe and the Pacific will now control all assets they need to make airpower a unified whole within their theaters. They will have what they need to conduct an air campaign--tankers, theater airlift, *and reconnaissance systems*, as well as their traditional combat assets--augmented as necessary by reinforcements from the United States. [emphasis added]¹²

The Secretary's remarks left no doubt that the days of reconnaissance assets flying in one theater commander's area of responsibility under control of another CINC were over.

In the testimony, Secretary Rice went on to announce the merger of the primary functions of the Strategic Air Command, Tactical Air Command and Military Airlift Command into two new commands, the Air Combat Command (ACC) and the Air Mobility Command (AMC). A

new U. S. Strategic Command (USSTRATCOM) would replace SAC as the primary overseer of the nation's strategic nuclear capabilities. This merger would have a significant impact on the command and control of airborne reconnaissance assets.

In preparation for creation of the new commands, SAC published a first draft of its "Implementation Plan for Establishment of the United States Strategic Command." This document stated that among USSTRATCOM's responsibilities is, "conducting appropriate worldwide strategic reconnaissance." The document goes on to say that USCINCSAT will exercise combatant command (COCOM) of assigned forces, including all strategic reconnaissance aircraft. Operational control (OPCON) of battle management forces, which includes strategic reconnaissance aircraft, was to be exercised by the air component commander (in this case the Air Combat Command, through its numbered air force for battle management assets, Second Air Force, with headquarters at Beale Air Force Base, California).¹³

The terms COCOM and OPCON may be unfamiliar to some readers and a more in-depth discussion is included in the Appendix. In general terms, COCOM authority provides full authority for a theater CINC to organize and employ commands and forces necessary to accomplish assigned missions. A key ingredient is that it gives the CINC authoritative direction over all aspects of military operations, joint training and logistics. Operational control is inherent in COCOM but can be transferred down the chain of command as necessary to accomplish the mission. Operational control includes full authority to organize and employ commands and forces, assign tasks, and designate objectives.¹⁴ For the purpose of this discussion, OPCON would be the authority to task and schedule reconnaissance missions, which is a key issue in the command and control debate for reconnaissance assets.

A key change in the proposed reorganization was that the command and control function exercised by SAC through its Strategic Reconnaissance Center (SRC) would now be exercised through a numbered air force. Two additional layers, the Air Combat Command and Second Air Force, now existed between the OPCON function and the unified commander responsible for the mission.

As the USSTRATCOM implementation plan began to be reviewed, disagreements surfaced over the proposed command arrangements. Among others, the principal issue was whether or not the regional theater CINCs would get OPCON of forces in their theater. Based on Secretary Rice's Congressional testimony and lessons learned during Desert Shield/Desert Storm, the STRATCOM implementation plan position, with OPCON maintained at Second Air Force, appeared to be in jeopardy.

On March 12, 1992, the EUCOM Director of Operations (ECJ3) sent a letter to the Deputy CINCEUCOM supporting the position that, "the Theater CINC is in the best position to control the flight schedule and balance the various tasking requirements."¹⁵ The letter outlined an apparent difference in interpretation between the USSTRATCOM implementation plan and what EUCOM expected.

Informal discussions on command arrangements continued through March 1992. On March 27, 1992, the Joint Staff Policy Division (J-5) presented to the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, a proposed approval memorandum for the Secretary of Defense recommending approval of a changed USSTRATCOM implementation plan. The accompanying documentation, coordinated with all theater CINCs and well as USSTRATCOM, stated, "[Theater] CINCs will exercise OPCON through respective USAF component commanders or CTFs, as

appropriate."¹⁶ The Chairman, JCS, signed the letter on April 6, 1992, recommending approval of the implementation plan, and the Deputy Secretary of Defense approved it on June 1, 1992.¹⁷ Contrary to the original USSTRATCOM implementation plan, OPCON would not remain with Second Air Force but would be delegated to the theaters.

It readily became apparent to everyone involved that giving the theater CINCs OPCON of the reconnaissance forces would not be a simple matter, as most of the theater command staffs had neither the manning nor expertise to handle the multitude of tasks necessary to effectively command and control the reconnaissance forces. Since the theater staffs were not prepared to assume OPCON, CINCSTRAT continued to exercise it through Second Air Force.

On June 15, 1992, USCINCSTRAT sent a message to all theater CINCs and the Air Combat Command commander clarifying the handoff of OPCON to the theaters. The message stated that, "until appropriate MOAs [Memorandum of Agreements] have been completed and supporting management structures developed, UNCINCSTRAT will continue to exercise OPCON through the Global Operations Center (GOC) at Second Air Force."¹⁸ On June 26, 1992, USSTRATCOM hosted a meeting to discuss the transfer of OPCON. The USSTRATCOM position at this meeting was that those CINCs who were ready to exercise OPCON without further assistance from Second Air Force could do so on July 1, 1992. For all others, "...present arrangements will continue until formal MOAs are signed outlining support to be provided by ACC/2AF [Air Combat Command/Second Air Force]."¹⁹ Some CINC's representatives advised that they would be requesting personnel support and augmentation, including some permanent personnel transfers.

As the effort to transfer OPCON to the theater CINCs progressed, problems continued

to arise. The gist of these issues revolved around the differing levels of control that each theater wanted to exercise. While all CINCs wanted the authority to task, schedule and execute missions, some did not understand the many other complex functions involved in command and control, including mission planning, track development, threat assessment and detailed flight-following requirements. Memoranda of agreement would have to specifically identify this division of responsibilities.

Meanwhile, the Air Combat Command staff, which now had command of all reconnaissance assets not deployed to the theater, as well as programmatic oversight for the assets, now began to understand the benefits of centralized command and control. In a paper prepared for the command section at ACC, action officers noted that small aircraft fleets work better when all functions are centered under a single director and that OPCON, "is most efficient if retained by a central manager vs. multiple theaters."²⁰ Acting on some of these recommendations, the Commander, Air Combat Command, sent a message to all theater CINCs on July 7, 1992, recommending that the CINCs retain the key elements of OPCON, while delegating the day to day management functions to Second Air Force ("Track development, threat assessment, C2, logistics, refueling requests, sensor and airframe oversight.")²¹

Exactly how much the theater CINCs agreed with the ACC Commander's proposal is unknown, but in a paper prepared for him on August 18, 1992, his staff stated that, "Final resolution of air component/ACC/2AF roles in exercise of OPCON will be reflected in STRATCOM/theater MOUs (in coordination)." The paper went on to state that the ACC staff continued to support the previous proposal submitted to the CINCs for the following reasons:

- Most efficient and effective methods for worldwide mission accomplishment in peace and war.

- Appropriate for taskings which transcend theater boundaries.
- Supports limited theater "recce smart" staff elements with augmentation, e.g. Desert Storm type operation.²²

The theaters and STRATCOM, through Second Air Force, continued to work on the Memoranda of Agreement. The MOAs appear to be well coordinated by STRATCOM in an effort to make them somewhat consistent among theaters; however, the division of responsibility itself is troublesome in some aspects. Most theaters want execution authority for missions, but allow Second Air Force to establish flying safety requirements and safety of flight recall procedures. All theaters plan to monitor or flight-follow missions but also task Second Air Force to maintain a "watch" for all missions. Some task Second Air Force to recall missions for safety of flight problems, while others state that Second Air Force should "provide *recommendation for mission recall* to [theater] for safety of flight considerations." [emphasis added]²³

At issue here is not the individual memoranda, but the diversity and apparent ambiguity and division of responsibility for the safety and effectiveness of these missions. These concerns, along with other incidents involving hostile fire against U.S. aircraft, prompted action by the Joint Staff. On October 26, 1992, the Director of the Joint Staff directed a review of peacetime reconnaissance programs in light of the dismantling of the Strategic Reconnaissance Center at SAC, and certain incidents within the peacetime reconnaissance program. The emphasis of the review was to be on improving support to the warfighter, the Intelligence Community, and the National Command Authority.²⁴

While the scope of this review goes beyond command and control, some findings point to problems associated with delegating OPCON of reconnaissance assets to the theater CINCs.

The author disagrees with some of the findings in the review, principally because the recommendations "were made consistent with both the concept of providing OPCON to Theater CINC's and the directives outlined in SM 401-87 ["Peacetime Reconnaissance and Certain Sensitive Operations"]."²⁵ Some of the findings, however, still demonstrate problems with the current command and control arrangements.

The introduction to the study stated that, "Airborne reconnaissance assets will continue to face budget declines and will require central management." The study's author also perceived a "lack of appreciation by the CINC staffs for the sensitivity with which the NCA [National Command Authorities] and JS [Joint Staff] view reactions to and the planning complexities involved with airborne reconnaissance." These two observations reveal that, while theater CINC's want control over reconnaissance assets, there are aspects of overall management and supervision that theater CINC staffs do not understand.

The study also pointed out that, "command and control flight following procedures are not uniform among the CINC's," and "there is a lack of standardization among theaters concerning the rigorous training of reconnaissance flight crews, either upon arrival in theater or on a continuing basis once deployed." It is important to understand that flight crews are rotated into theater on a temporary basis and may work in several different theaters in the space of a year. Working with different flight-following procedures can be cumbersome, if not potentially hazardous, due to the complexities involved in these operations.

Perhaps the key finding in the Joint Staff study, and an issue which pervades many of the other findings, relates to the overall command structure.

Although 2nd Air Force (2AF) hosts the majority of reconnaissance expertise formerly resident at the SRC [Strategic Reconnaissance Center at Headquarters,

SAC], their capabilities are under used.... 2AF flight monitoring of flights varies significantly from theater to theater and not all CINCs have MOAs with 2AF. *Lines of command/authority between USSTRATCOM, Air Combat Command (ACC) and 2AF are many layered.* [emphasis added]²⁶

In general, most recommendations for improvement in the Joint Staff study focus on better coordination between the theater CINCs, USSTRATCOM, ACC, and Second Air Force. As noted, a key assumption in the study was that the theater CINCs maintain OPCON of the reconnaissance assets. The Joint Staff findings, along with the reservations expressed by the Air Combat Command, indicate that current command arrangements are far from satisfactory and require further examination.

Effective Command and Control for Reconnaissance Assets

What then is the answer to effective command and control for reconnaissance assets? The current system evolved from incremental responses to specific problems with the old system. This evolution failed to recognize the need for command and control of small fleet assets that have extensive peacetime roles as well as wartime functions. What is needed is an objective look at what is expected from reconnaissance assets and then to build an effective command and control system to fulfill those expectations.

It must be understood that the small fleet size and extensive peacetime demands makes these assets different from other military forces. While Air Force doctrine states, "Organize for wartime effectiveness, not peacetime efficiency,"²⁷ the doctrine lacks conclusive validity for these forces because of their primary contribution to peacetime intelligence collection. The Joint Staff study on peacetime reconnaissance notes:

The allocation of airborne reconnaissance is a zero sum game. Intelligence requirements will continue to stipulate asset allocation. However, the shift in

operational use of airborne reconnaissance assets from supporting strategic requirements to satisfying tactical needs must be recognized.²⁸

What is needed is a command and control system that best satisfies all users but still provides effective oversight of both resources and operations. The current command and control system does neither.

There are two major problems with the command and control systems used so far. First, the old system failed to provide theater CINCs the support they needed. Secondly, the new system gives CINCs the major control they deem necessary over tasking and scheduling of the assets, but is inefficient and somewhat ineffective in fulfilling the remaining responsibilities associated with OPCON of these forces.

The command and control system in place prior to Desert Storm undoubtedly failed to meet the all theater commanders' needs. The U.S. Central Command was unfamiliar with the capabilities and constraints of these systems, since the theater had little practical experience with them. Even in theaters with permanent reconnaissance assets assigned, the lack of exercise support precluded theater staffs from having the expertise necessary to employ them during war. It was not the system itself but rather the emphasis placed on national peacetime collection requirements at the expense of theater requirements, to include exercise support necessary for effective warfighting, that convinced theater CINCs the current system was broken.

The subsequent change to give the theater CINCs OPCON of assigned forces was not well conceived. While theater CINCs did get the authority they wanted to control assets, specifically to task and schedule them, the theater staffs failed to understand the many other complexities and mundane activities involved in exercising effective command and control of reconnaissance forces. Not sufficiently manned for these responsibilities nor really desiring

them in the first place, the CINCs sought to share many of the responsibilities with USSTRATCOM and its subordinates through memorandums of understanding. The result is a multi-layered system in which responsibility and accountability are fragmented and the potential for accident or incident has increased. In addition, there are large redundancies as the theaters duplicate certain common efforts such as flight-following and other management responsibilities.

A command and control system is needed that permits an effective transfer of resources and experienced personnel to the theater along with the authority to use those sorties as the theater commander directs to support his mission.

One might argue that one answer to this problem would be to delegate larger reconnaissance staffs to the theaters and allow them to exercise the full scope of OPCON responsibilities. Realities in the current national security environment argue against this. While some theaters have standing requirements and a somewhat permanent reconnaissance presence, others have assets assigned based upon current contingencies and changing requirements. With the small size of the fleet and the growing number of requirements placed on it, flexibility is needed to increase or decrease assets and personnel as appropriate.

Permanently assigning large theater staffs would tend to defeat the flexibility needed for managing the small reconnaissance fleet. On the contrary, having a centrally managed fleet as was previously done at SAC allows for a pool of experienced reconnaissance expertise to be immediately available to meet contingency requirements. A command and control system with an established roadmap and procedures for theater augmentation is essential to transitioning the reconnaissance fleet smoothly and effectively from peace to war.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

So what is the answer for effective command and control? The Unified Command Plan assigns responsibility for conducting appropriate worldwide strategic reconnaissance to USCINSTRAT. Operational control of the assets should remain with CINCUSSTRATCOM and should be exercised through his staff. The USSTRATCOM should be designated a supporting CINC to provide reconnaissance for all geographic theater CINCs who would have direct liaison with USSTRATCOM for reconnaissance matters. Theater CINCs would go directly to the Joint Staff for resolution of conflicts over priority.

The command and control functions previously delegated through the Air Combat Command to Second Air Force should be made a permanent part of a Global Operations Center working directly for the USSTRATCOM Director for Operations (J-3). This staff would oversee all reconnaissance matters and would work directly with the Joint Staff on allocation priorities.

Inherent in this command arrangement would be dedicated support for exercises and specific plans and agreements with theater CINCs to augment theater staffs for both exercises and real world contingencies as well as transitioning to war. During war, theater CINCs would directly control operations through a staff augmented with expertise from USSTRATCOM. The Joint Staff would have to ensure, through their monthly reconnaissance approval process, sufficient dedicated support for theater warfighters and ensure that those priorities remain undiminished as pressures to support national agency tasking increase. Thus, theater CINCs would get dedicated support; and reconnaissance assets would be more efficiently employed, effectively managed, and safely operated.

An effective command and control system is absolutely necessary in order to make

limited reconnaissance forces effective, flexible and responsive. This study has attempted to demonstrate that our current command and control system has evolved in response to a failure to provide warfighting theater CINCs with the resources they need. This failure resulted not from the command and control system itself, but from decisions made at the national level to support peacetime collection at the expense of support to theater CINCs.

The recommended command and control system will eliminate the fragmentation of responsibility and accountability which has in the past proven far less than optimal for U. S. military forces. When coupled with a reprioritization of assets to ensure theater CINCs receive the support they need, in particular exercise support to ensure preparedness for warfighting, the system will not only satisfy all users, but will be ready the next time it is called upon to transition quickly and efficiently to supporting large military operations, such as Desert Storm. The forces will still be available to collect intelligence in a peacetime security environment increasingly marked by danger and uncertainty.

APPENDIX

(The following definitions are taken from Joint Pub 1-02 (Formerly JCS Pub 1), Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms.)

Combatant Command (command authority)--Also called COCOM. Non-transferable command authority established by title 10, United States Code, section 164, exercised only by commanders of unified or specified combatant commands. Combatant Command (command authority) is the authority of a Combatant Commander to perform those functions of command over assigned forces involving organizing and employing commands and forces, assigning tasks, designating objectives, and giving authoritative direction over all aspects of military operations, joint training, and logistics necessary to accomplish the missions assigned to the command. Combatant command (command authority) should be exercised through the commanders of subordinate organizations; normally this authority is exercised through the Service component commander. Combatant Command (command authority) provides full authority to organize and employ commands and forces as the CINC considers necessary to accomplish assigned missions.

Operational Control--Transferable command authority which may be exercised by commanders at any echelon at or below the level of combatant command. Operational control is inherent in Combatant Command (command authority) and is the authority to perform those functions of command over subordinate forces involving organizing and employing commands and forces, assigning tasks, designating objectives, and giving authoritative direction necessary to accomplish missions assigned to the command. Operational control should be exercised through the commanders of subordinate organizations; normally this authority is exercised through the Service component commanders. Operational control normally provides full authority to organize commands and forces and to employ those forces as the commander in operational control considers necessary to accomplish assigned missions. Operational control does not, in and of itself, include authoritative direction for logistics or matters of administration, discipline, internal organization, or unit training.

ENDNOTES

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3. Macartney, John. "Intelligence: A Consumer's Guide," in Dearth (ed.), Strategic Intelligence: Theory and Application, Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College, 1991, p. 85.
4. Fairless, 2.
5. U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff. Secretarial Memorandum 712-89, "Revision of the Unified Command Plan (SECRET)," Washington, D.C., 16 August 1989, p. 19.
6. Ibid, p. 18.
7. U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff. Secretarial Memorandum 401-87, Volume I, "Peacetime Reconnaissance and Certain Sensitive Operations (SECRET)," Washington, D.C., 18 September 1987, pp. I-17,18.
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10. Ibid., (Page un-numbered).
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17. Atwood, Donald J., Acting Secretary of Defense. "Activation of the United States Strategic Command," Memorandum for Secretaries of the Military Departments, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Undersecretary of Defense for Policy, Washington, D.C., 1 June 1992.
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